OREGON ODDITIES

AND

ITEMS OF INTEREST

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION OF OREGON
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The items in this bulletin, selected from the material compiled by the Writers' Project and the Historical Records Survey of the Works Progress Administration, are representative of the significant collections being made by these nation-wide programs.

The Historical Records Survey is inventorying all sources of early Oregon history, including county and state records, town and church archives, historic cemeteries, old manuscripts and imprints, old printing presses, monuments and relics, private diaries, letters, and memoirs, historic buildings, and Indian records and lore.


In addition to all the state guides, interesting publications now available include American Stuff; Cape Cod Pilot; Hoosier Tall Stories; The Hopi; Italians of New York; New Orleans City Guide; Whaling Masters; Who's Who in the Zoo; and Wisconsin Indian Lore.

Publications now in preparation by the Oregon Writers' Project include the Oregon Guide, an Oregon Almanac for 1939, Old Towns of Oregon, and Fire Prevention in Portland.
Much concerning the flora of Oregon inevitably intermingled with Indian lore. Nearly 200 plants found a place in the commercial, industrial, medical, culinary and religious life of Northwest tribes. With the passing of winter, Indian camps became active with preparation for the annual food-gathering. Tribes migrated to Camas Prairie, Wapato Lake or Wocus Swamp for the year's harvests.

A dozen varieties of berries, wild crab-apple, plum and Oregon grape ripen in season. Bird-cherry, salal and currant grow in profusion in forests and along the seashore. Nuts of various kinds were stored for the lean months, and seeds of numerous grasses and rushes added the important starchy element to the Indian diet. The white explorers and settlers, who came later, adopted many of these plants for their own use.

WAPATO

Wapato was one of the principal food plants of the lower Columbia River Indians. Bearing white blossoms in July and August, it grows in the water along streams and ponds. The edible tubers of the plant are rooted in the mud at the bottom of the stream. Indian women harvested wapato in April. They waded into the water, often shoulder deep, hung to the sides of boats and grubbed the tubers loose with their toes. Froid from the mud, the smooth tubers floated to the surface of the water, where they were gathered.

Wapato bulbs when boiled resemble potatoes, with a slightly sweeter taste. Some have likened them to chestnuts.

During the winter Lewis and Clark spent in Oregon, they existed on a diet which consisted mainly of elk meat and wapato.

CAMAS

The Indians made a stout cord from the dried stalks of the nettle. The steamed roots of the plant were used as food. Nettle greens are an old-fashioned dish in this country and in Europe.

The pounded root of the Solomon's Seal is still used by some Indian tribes as a remedy for rheumatism.

KOUSE

Kouse was another important food plant of the Northwest Indian tribes. It was known to the early explorers as "biscuit root," and to the French-Canadian voyageurs as "racine blanche." To prepare kouse
or food, Indians pounded them to a paste in a mortar, then moulded the paste into cakes which were dried in the sun.

**CAT'S-EAR**

Known in Oregon as the "cat's-ear" and in California as the mariposa, theago lily, state flower of Utah, has edible bulbs which were the Indians' choicest delicacies. Sego, or seego, is an Indian word which is a general term for certain types of food. Sego bulbs were also eaten by the white settlers, especially in Utah, when they were faced withrought and starvation.

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Yerba Buena is a delicate, evergreen belonging to the mint family. It was named by the Spaniards for its medicinal value, and it has been called Oregon tea because the early Oregon pioneers found its dried leaves to be an excellent substitute for tea.

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One of the most widely distributed Oregon wild flowers, the dog-tooth violet, blooms profusely from April until late in May in the woods of valleys and foothills. Indians eat the bulbs of this plant, which has many local names, such as lamb's, deer's or adder's tongue, spring lily, etc.

**WILD BLACKBERRY**

The wild blackberry has been very popular with both Indians and whites, up to and including the present time. It is the "green bryor" of which Lewis and Clark wrote: "It rises perpendicularly to a height of from four or five feet, when it descends in an arch, becoming procumbent, or rests on some neighboring plant or shrub...the fruit is a berry, resembling the blackberry in every respect and is eaten when ripe and is much esteemed by the natives." The Indians made an infusion of the root bark for checking diarrhea and dysentery, and the medicinal value of the blackberry root was also appreciated by the pioneers.

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The berries and tender shoots of both the thimble and salmon berries were eaten by the Indians. Salmon berry shoots were usually eaten with fish spawn, or oil. The astringent bark of the salmon berry was valued.

**SKUNK CABBAGE**

Skunk cabbage is a familiar plant to practically everybody in western Oregon. Early in February, the big, yellow spaths appear, and from then until May the swamps and swales are brightened by the yellow blooms. After the blossoms, tropical appearing leaves develop, often of great size. Skunk cabbage roots were used by the Indians for food, which saved many an Indian tribe from famine. When prepared for food, the roots were cooked in pits, in a manner similar to that used for waspate as described in John Ball's journal. Salmon and other large fish, when being prepared for steaming, were wrapped in the leaves of this plant.

According to the Cathlamet Indian legend, there were no salmon in ancient times. The Indians' only food consisted of leaves and roots, principally skunk cabbage. According to the legend, one spring the pioneers found its dried leaves to be an excellent substitute for tea.

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**WILD STRAWBERRY**

Two varieties of wild strawberries grow in Oregon. The short-stemmed, thick-leaved variety grows and bears its fruit close to the ground. The other type bears fruit on long, slender stems, often taller than the foliage. This species has thin, deeply-veined leaves. Wild strawberries were a welcome part of the Indian diet. Those who remember western Oregon's pioneer days, say that at that time wild strawberries were large, had a finer flavor than any cultivated berry of today, and grew plentifully everywhere. It has been said that grazing sheep have de-
The following recipe for cough syrup, used by early pioneers, is still in use today:

Boil together equal amounts of horsetail and mullen leaves, with a small amount of liverwort and add enough sugar to the liquid to make a thin syrup.

Another pioneer remedy, used as a spring tonic or blood purifier, was made of burdock roots as follows:

Wash, scrape and slice the roots, cover with cold water and let stand six hours; then strain off the liquid and drink. Bruised burdock leaves were used as poultices for burns.

There are three varieties of fireweed in Oregon; giant, pinnacled and yellow. The blossoms of the first two mentioned species are pink, and the latter, as the name indicates, yellow.

Fireweed is so named because the plants spring up quickly in burned-over areas. Beekeepers prize this plant because it keeps their hives filled with honey. In the spring, tender shoots of the fireweed are often used as greens.

Even poison oak was found beneficial by the Indians. Baskets were made of its slender stems. The fresh juice was used in making ornamental designs on utensils. The juice was used to burn warts and also to cure ringworm.

Kinnikinnick is a small, trailing shrub, with reddish bark and leather-like evergreen leaves. The fruit is bright red and, although very dry and tasteless, it was part of the Indians' diet. The shrub received its name from an East Indian smoking mixture. Clerks of the Hudson's Bay Company smoked the dried leaves.

The bark of the Pacific Dogwood is very bitter and was successfully used as quinino by early settlers of Oregon.

The blue-berried elder is a natural medicine chest. Its inner bark is a very powerful emetic. Elderberry tea is used in breaking up colds. The blossoms cooked in oil make a cooling ointment, and the fruit boiled down acts as a mild aperient and diuretic. Besides its medicinal value, the fruit of the blue elder is good for making pies, wine and jelly. The Indians made flutes from the young shoots.

The Oregon grape, state flower of Oregon, has clusters of dark berries, grape-like in appearance, which make a fine jelly. Oregon grape roots are valued for medicinal use, and every year tons of them are cut and marketed. Strictly speaking, the state flower is not a grape, but a barberry.

A valued plant among the Indians was the syringa. Arrows were made from the young, straight shoots, and bows from the larger and stronger stems. The macerated leaves made a good soap substitute.

Miners' lettuce has been a favorite green or salad plant among Pacific Coast inhabitants since very early times. Its many names: Indian lettuce, Spanish lettuce, etc., are derived from its popular use. The miners of the99 especially valued it, as they needed fresh vegetables, but had no time, in their wild rush for gold, to cultivate gardens. Seeing the Indians gather wild lettuce, the miners quickly adapted it to their own use.

Cascara bark was prized by the Indians and pioneers as well appreciated its values as a laxative.

The young, firm "fiddle-heads" of the broken orn are good to eat, having a flavor resembling that of asparagus. They are seldom used hero as food, except by Asiatics and Europeans who prized such a dish in their native homelands.

Berries of the wild rose were called "canine food" by the Indians, possibly an indication that they ate them during periods of food shortage.